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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether the incidence of classroom behavior problems of students with behavior disorders were reduced in collaborative/cooperative classes when compared with traditional special education classes. Subjects were 15 students in grades 6 through 8 who spent half their class day in a collaborative/cooperative classroom and the other half in a traditional classroom. In the collaborative/cooperative model, a regular education teacher and a special education teacher worked together in a classroom with both regular and special needs students. The number of behavior problem referrals to the school office was compared for each of these settings. Results indicated a significant difference in number of office referrals, with 31 percent of subject referrals coming from the collaborative/cooperative classes and 69 percent from special education classes. Three factors of the collaborative/cooperative setting are suggested as responsible for this difference: (1) peer pressure; (2) clearly defined roles for the collaborating teachers; and (3) a strong discipline plan. (Contains 13 references.) (DB)

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ABSTRACT

BEHAVIOR DISORDERED STUDENTS IN COLLABORATIVE/COOPERATIVE CLASSES: DOES BEHAVIOR IMPROVE?

Presenters: Doug Mills and Clete Bulach

Problem: This study has addressed the concern of the behavior disordered student in a collaborative/cooperative program. The discipline records of behavior disordered students within a collaborative/cooperative class were compared to their discipline records over the same period of time in non collaborative/cooperative classes. This comparison was designed to show what relationship exists between instances of behavior problems of behavior disordered students in a collaborative/cooperative model and the instances of behavior difficulties of those same students in a regular classroom.

Procedure: A group of fifteen students was selected to participate in this study. These students spent half of the class day in a collaborative/cooperative classroom and the other half in a non-collaborative/cooperative classroom for a period of 16 months. The behavior records (office referrals) of each student were examined. The number of referrals that occurred from non-collaborative/cooperative classes was compared to referrals from the collaborative/cooperative classes.

Findings: The comparison of office referrals from regular class versus collaborative/cooperative class indicated that a significant difference was present. The number of referrals from collaborative/cooperative classes was much lower than referrals from regular classes. The t-test for correlated groups was the statistical test used to analyze the means, and it yielded a t-score of 7.8 (p.0.000). The null hypothesis that there would be no difference in instances of disruptive behavior for behavior disordered students who are included in a collaborative/cooperative class when compared to their behavior in non-collaborative/cooperative classes was rejected.

Conclusions and Recommendations: The placement of behavior disorder students in a regular classroom setting with some type of support does appear to be a viable educational environment. This study offers some encouraging data to support the idea of "including" the behavior disordered student in a regular classroom setting. Based on the results of this study, the disruptive behavior of behavior disordered students should decrease. Three factors appear to have caused this decrease. Those three factors were peer pressure, clearly defined roles for the collaborating teachers, and a strong discipline plan.

Behavior Disordered Students in Collaborative/Cooperative Classes: Does Behavior Improve?

Introduction

The idea of mainstreaming or placing special needs students in a regular classroom setting has been used for many years to address the issue of least restrictive environment. While some educators believe that least restrictive environment means a regular classroom, it has become clear that many students' needs can not be met in a regular classroom setting. The practice of mainstreaming is being replaced with a practice called inclusion. According to Willis (1995) "Inclusion of children with disabilities in regular classrooms is becoming increasingly common in schools across North America" (p.1). Inclusion goes beyond the idea of simply placing a special needs student in a regular classroom, and includes making any and all modifications needed to insure that these students do achieve. Regular and special education teachers are required to work together to develop appropriate programs for these students.

One type of program that has been designed in an attempt to address the special needs student in a regular classroom is the collaborative/cooperative model. This model places a special education teacher in a regular classroom along with a regular classroom teacher. The class is a mix of special needs students and regular students. Working closely together, the special education and regular teachers develop curriculum modifications designed to meet the needs of all students in the class.

One of the concerns expressed about the collaborative/cooperative model is the appropriateness of including the behavior disordered student in a regular classroom setting. According to Willis (1995) the range of disabilities in an inclusion classroom can vary from Down's syndrome to blindness to any other physical or mental disability. This causes parents, regular teachers, special education teachers and administrators to question the validity of placing these types of students in a regular classroom. In particular, the practice of including behavior disordered students in such a setting may not be wise because of the possibility that their behavior disorder will disrupt the classroom and ruin the quality of education for all the students in that setting.

Purpose of study

The purpose of this study was to determine if the behavior problems of behavior disordered students are reduced in collaborative/cooperative classes when compared with instances of behavior problems in their regular classroom.

Justification of Study

Since the goal of inclusion and the collaborative/cooperative program is based upon the needs of the whole student and not merely their academic achievement (NASBE 1992, p. 12) it seems appropriate to include the behavior disordered student within this type of program. However, the impact of the collaborative/cooperative model on behavior problems of the behavior disordered student must be addressed.

Parents have often expressed concern that the disruptive behavior of behavior disordered students could adversely affect the learning of the regular education students in the classroom. Many educators worry that the needs of some behavior disordered students cannot be met in the regular classroom setting. They recommend that behavior disordered students be isolated from regular education students. Because of these concerns, new programs such as collaborative/cooperative classes, must be evaluated to determine their effectiveness.

Review of Literature

The placement of special needs students in regular classes has evolved since the passage of P.L. 94-142 (NASBE, 1992). Included within the language of P.L. 94-142 was the phrase, "least restrictive environment." The phrase was interpreted by most involved in education as meaning the regular classroom. It soon became evident that without extensive modifications many special needs students could not successfully achieve in this type of setting.

The more recent idea of inclusion goes beyond mainstreaming. The entire educational experience of the special needs student is taken into consideration within the framework of inclusion. Social experiences, interpersonal skills, behavior and academics are all important aspects included in the inclusion model (Rabore, 1992).

The collaborative/cooperative model has become popular in attempting to reach the goal of full inclusion. Many educators believe that full inclusion is achieved by keeping all special needs students in a regular classroom with both a regular and a special education teacher (Smelter, Rasch,& Yudeivitz,1994).

The idea of placing special education students in the regular classroom has had many vocal opponents and proponents. Opponents argue that these students will interfere with the progress of regular students, while proponents believe that the special needs student will benefit from the overall environment of the regular classroom setting (Semmel, Abernathy, Butera,& Lesar, 1991). While many proponents argue that nothing short of full-inclusion will do, most educators feel that special needs student should be included in regular classes on a full time basis "but, if

appropriate and necessary, they still can be pulled out for special instruction or related services" (Arnold and Dodge, 1994 pg. 23).

Of particular interest is the question of placing behavior disordered students in a collaborative/cooperative model. Many school systems have removed students labeled as behavior disordered from the regular classroom setting. During the 1987-88 school year, only 10% of these students were served in a regular classroom setting (Jenson, 1993).

Many of these students exhibit social problems that originate from performance deficits and inability to comprehend nonverbal communication (Sanbornie, Marshall, & Ellis, 1990). Critics argue that placing these students in a regular class can have an adverse effect on other students in the class. Some believe that in a few cases regular students could begin to mimic the actions of the behavior disordered student (Smelter, Rasch, & Yudeivitz, 1994). Many question the validity of placing a behavior disordered child, who is prone to emotional outburst in a regular classroom.

Even though the arguments against including behavior disordered students in regular classes are valid and need to be addressed, the special needs of these students can not be ignored. Local schools must be encouraged to develop new and unique programs to meet the needs of all students (Fuchs and Fuchs, 1994). Regular and special education teachers often lack the training necessary to create and implement appropriate programs for the behavior disordered student and must receive additional training to successfully deal with these students in a regular classroom setting (Baines, Baines, & Masterson, 1994).

Walker and Bullis (1991) examined the integration of behavior disordered students into regular classes and the impact they had on the social context of those classes. Very little impact on the social context of the class was observed when behavior disordered students were placed in regular classes.

Rather than focusing on the impact the behavior disordered student has on the regular classes, it seems more appropriate to address the impact the regular class has on the behavior disordered student. Opponents argue that placing the special needs students in a regular classroom can lead to frequently misunderstood and stigmatized labels (Smelter, Rasch, & Yudeivitz, 1994). Research (Kauffman, Gerber, & Semmel, 1988) has shown, however, that these labels are attached to students for lack of achievement and are independent of special education services. Granted teasing and ridicule may occur, but according to Villa and Thousand (1995) this occurs in all classrooms. It is an unfortunate reality that teasing from peers occurs. Villa and Thousand, however, go on to say that there tends to be less teasing in inclusion classrooms. They suggest that this may occur because teachers are more likely to teach conflict management and problem solving skills in this type of classroom.

Little research has been done to evaluate the validity of placing the behavior disordered student in a regular classroom setting. Including them with the regular students as opposed to isolating them with special education students should encourage more prosocial behavior. According to Villa and Thousand (1995)

> A person who feels a sense of alienation and exclusion is punished for giving evidence of lack of belonging through disruptive behavior by being further excluded and alienated, which then gives rise to accelerated rule-violating behavior. Is it any wonder that removing students with emotional/behavioral challenges from the regular classrooom often results in increases in aggressive or violent behavior?

Assuming that their opinion is an accurate one, placing students in a regular classroom should reduce disruptive behavior.

The review of literature can best be summarized by Willis (1995) who stated that "Experts differ on whether inclusion is proceeding in ways that best meet children's varied needs"(p.1). It is clear that inclusion has and will continue to be a controversial topic. Much of this controversy is caused by a lack of understanding on the part of both opponents and proponents (Arnold and Dodge, 1994). This action research project will address just one of the many questions that have arisen from the inclusion of special needs students in a regular classroom setting. Since, their are conflicting opinions and little data on the effect of placement of behavior disordered students in the regular classroom on disruptive behavior, the null hypothesis will be used.

Hypothesis

> There will be no difference in instances of disruptive behavior for behavior disordered students who are included In a collaborative/cooperative class when compared to their behavior in non-collaborative/cooperative classes.

Definitions

P.L. 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children's Act) - Federal law passed in 1975. It guaranteed that all children, regardless of their disability or perceived educability, are entitled to a free, appropriate education.

Least Restrictive Environment - Guaranteed under P.L. 94-142, must provide to the maximum extent possible- "students with disabilities must be educated with children who are not handicapped" (NASBE, 1992).

Inclusion - Students with disabilities placed in a regular classroom setting, with or without the help of a special education teacher. The amount of time spent in regular classes is based on the needs of the individual student.

Collaborative/Cooperative Model - Program designed to include special needs students in a regular classroom setting. A regular education teacher works with a special education teacher in a classroom with both regular and special needs students.

Disruptive Behavior - Those behaviors that resulted in an office referral.

Non Collaborative/Cooperative Classes - Regular classes with no special education teacher or a resource special education class.

Methodology

Subjects

A group of fifty-two students from the total special education population were identified as either behavior disordered or having exhibited some behavioral problems. From this group of fifty-two, fifteen students had been enrolled in collaborative/cooperative classes the previous year and were currently enrolled in this program. These fifteen students were selected as subjects for this study because almost two years of disciplinary history were available on them in both types of settings. Three of the fifteen students were from sixth grade classes, seven students were from seventh grade classes and five students were from eighth grade classes. Each subject was currently enrolled in collaborative/cooperative classes and non collaborative/cooperative classes. So that a valid comparison between the two types of classes could be made, the amount of time spent in each class was computed. Each student spent an average of 3.4 classes per day in a collaborative/cooperative setting and 3.6 classes per day in a non collaborative/cooperative setting. The average length of time that the students had been enrolled in a special education program was 4.2 years. All of the students had been in a collaborative/cooperative program the previous year.

Collection of Data

The discipline records of the fifteen students were collected for the previous school year. These records, covering a 16 month period, were combined with the discipline records for each student from the current school year (through March, 1994). The discipline records included the name of the teacher making the office referral. This made it easy to separate the referrals that came from collaborative/cooperative classes and those that came from non collaborative/cooperative classes.

Procedures

To establish a consistent data collection method it was determined that a "behavior problem" would be defined as those instances that resulted in an office referral. Once this was determined, the discipline records were reviewed to identify the instances of behavior problems for each of the fifteen students. After this information was collected the behavior problems were then categorized into collaborative/cooperative classes and non-collaborative/cooperative classes. The instances of behavior were then compared to determine if there was a significant difference between the number of behavioral problems in collaborative/cooperative classes and non-collaborative/cooperative classes.

Method of Analysis

The instances of behavior problems in collaborative/cooperative classes and non- collaborative/cooperative classes were compared using a t-test for correlated groups. The level of significance set to accept or reject the hypothesi was $P < .05$.

Limitations of the Study

The findings and conclusions of the study are limited because the subjects were selected from different grade levels and different classes. Methods used in various classes to control the behavior of students vary significantly. Offenses that result in an office referral in one class might not receive the same consequences in another class.

The cooperation between the regular classroom teacher and the special education teacher was different in the various classes. Roles were often defined differently and this could have resulted in varied rates of office referrals in collaborative/cooperative classes and non- collaborative/cooperative classes. Other behavior problems were not addressed within this study.

Results

The behavior records of fifteen students, identified as having behavior problems, were studied to determine if behavior problems declined when these students were placed in a collaborative/cooperative setting for part of the school day. Class records indicate that, on average, 3.4 classes per day were in a collaborative/cooperative setting while 3.6 classes were in a non-collaborative/cooperative setting.

Table 1 (next page) presents the comparison of behavior problems (office referrals) in collaborative/cooperative classes verses non-collaborative/cooperative classes. The fifteen students, included in the study, had been seen in the office an average of 12.9 times during the time encompassing the study. The number of referrals ranged from a high of twenty-two to a low of six. Every student had been sent to the office on at least six occasions from non-collaborative/cooperative classes. Of the fifteen students, only one had been to the office more times while in collaborative/cooperative than non-cooperative/cooperative classes. One student left school two weeks prior to the end of the study. This student's record was statistically adjusted to eliminate any effect on the study.

The total number of office referrals for all fifteen students was one hundred ninety-three. Comparison showed that 31% of the referrals were from collaborative/cooperative classes while 69% were from non- collaborative/ cooperative classes. The t-test for correlated groups was used to analyze the mean scores from the two groups (see Table 2).

Table 2.

A Comparison of Disruptive Behavior for Students in Two Different Settings.

Variable	SD	Mean	N	t-score	p-value
Collaborative/Cooperative	2.1	4.0	15	7.80	0.0000
Non-Collaborative/Cooperative	3.0	8.9	15		

Table 1.

A Comparison of Office Referrals in Two Different Classroom Settings

Student	# of Referrals in a CC Class	# of referrals in a NCC Class	Total
1	4	9	13
2	3	6	9
3	2	8	10
4	7	12	19
5	1	7	8
6	6	4	10
7	4	9	13
8	5	11	16
9	7	15	22
10	3	11	14
11	2	6	8
12	3	7	10
13	1	5	6
14	8	12	20
15	4	11	15
Totals	60 (31%)	133 (69%)	193

CC = Collaborative/Cooperative Class
NCC = Non-Collaborative/Cooperative Class

This analysis showed that the mean number of office referrals from collaborative/cooperative classes was 4.000 with a standard deviation of 2.129 The mean number of office referrals from non- collaborative/cooperative was 8.867 with a standard deviation of 2.986. At the .05 level of significance with a df of 14, a t-score of 2.048 was needed and at the .01 level a t-score of 2.763 was needed. The t-score for the group of fifteen students was calculated at 7.801. Consequently, the null hypothesis that there would be no difference in instances of disruptive behavior for behavior disordered students who are included in a collaborative/cooperative class when compared to their behavior in non-collaborative/cooperative classes was rejected.

Discussion

The most important factor that appeared to have a positive influence on classroom behavior was peer pressure. The regular education students exerted tremendous influence on the behavior disordered students to "behave". Expectations for behavior were not only defined by the teacher, but by students as well. Consequences for inappropriate behavior ranged from exclusion in group activities to almost complete ostracism in some cases. The influence of peer pressure often appeared to have equal and in some cases greater impact on behavior than the teacher in the class.

The type of discipline process that is in place in each classroom was also a major factor. During the study it became apparent, through discussions with teachers, that they felt a major factor in the reduction of behavior problems was having a discipline plan in place prior to the students being placed in the collaborative/cooperative classes. The data collected indicated that the occurrence of behavior problems were greatly reduced when a well thought out, clearly defined, discipline plan was in place. Those teams that had emphasized expectations for behavior had less instances of behavior problems in both cooperative/collaborative classes and non- cooperative/collaborative classes.

The relationship of the regular classroom teacher and the special education teacher, in terms of the duties and responsibilities and how they are divided was also a major factor. The dynamics of each classroom are different and the impact of this relationship appears to have consequences on the behaviors exhibited. In those classes where the roles of the regular education teacher were clearly defined, less behavior problems were noted. This coordination of roles appeared to have a positive affect on the behavior of all students. Further research in this area would be useful in helping new collaborative/cooperative teachers develop appropriate teaching relationships within their classes.

On the surface the collaborative/cooperative program appears to be highly successful in reducing disruptive behavior in behavior disordered students. The instances of behavior problems decreased significantly in those classes when compared to non-collaborative/cooperative classes. Three factors appear to have caused this decrease. Those three factors were peer pressure, clearly defined roles for the collaborating teachers, and a strong discipline plan. Determining which factor had the most influence was not a purpose of this research. However, from observations made in each of the collaborative classrooms, it appears that the efforts of the regular and special education teachers to establish a strong discipline plan were a very positive influence on reducing the frequency and severity of discipline problems. That policy to some extent determined each teacher's role on how they

operated in the collaborative room. Peer pressure is an important factor and it appears to work best when roles are defined and expectations are set and understood by all. Although peer pressure was a major factor in reducing disruptive behavior, it is doubtful that peer pressure would have occurred without the other two factors being in place.

The inclusion of special education students in regular classes is and will continue to be a controversial topic. A well coordinated, comprehensive program is needed to meet the needs of all students. This program will continue to have classrooms where special education students are not included in regular classrooms. While many students will benefit from programs such as the collaborative/cooperative model, it is important to remember that not all students with behavior problems will succeed even in this type of program. There will always be students who can not function in inclusion type classrooms.

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